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A

# S E R M O N.

Which might have been preached  
in EAST LOTHIAN, or YEA

Upon the 25th day of October 1761.

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Any reader who may be inclined  
to censure the stile and compo-  
sition of the following Sermon,  
is intreated to remember, that  
it is a popular discourse, where-  
in force of expression is often-  
times more requisite than cor-  
rectness.



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**F**ROM the foregoing chapter we learn, that the apostle Paul and his companions suffered shipwreck in their voyage to Rome; in the verses now read, the coast on which this disaster happened and the conduct of those living on that coast are described.

*When they were escaped, they knew that the island was called Melita.* If there be ought which can add to the terrors of shipwreck, it is that of being shipwrecked on an unknown coast, among men of a strange tongue and of savage manners, far from friends and countrymen, from those who are united to us by the ties of nature, of society, and of religion. After having been reserved, by the providence of God, from the fury of the waves, to be exposed to the cruelty and depredations of selfish, hard-hearted, unfeeling creatures on shore, is indeed a wretched change



of misery ; it is, to use the words of David when in great strait, *not to fall into the hand of God, whose mercies are great, but to fall into the hand of man*, 2 Sam. xxiv. 14.

Such might have been the reflexions of the unhappy sufferers in my text, when shipwrecked upon an *unknown coast* ; neither, indeed, could their fears be dissipated by their learning that, they had landed on the coast of *Melita*. That island, we know, was a rocky, barren spot, and separated far from every civilized land : yet they did not long remain in this state of apprehension and uncertainty ; for, as we are immediately told, *the barbarous people shewed them no little kindness*.

This expression, at first sight, may seem to imply a contradiction : from humane and civilized men, such, for instance, as those of our own country, *no little kindness* towards the unfortunate might have been expected ; but that the same benignity, and eagerness to serve and to relieve, should have been shewed by *barbarous people*, appears strange.

The words used by the sacred historian deserve a more particular explanation. The *Greeks*, a proud and conceited people, were accustomed to term all men *barbarous* who differed from them in language, manners, and form of religious worship ; and *Luke*, who writes in their language, has adopted their phraseology.

But however barbarous the people of *Melita* may have been in name, their dispositions and behaviour declare that they were men : *They shewed no little kindness to Paul and his companions ; for they kindled a fire, and received them every*



*every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.*

I need scarcely inform you, that we are not to imagine that the good offices of those poor, simple, well-meaning Pagans consisted merely in kindling a few sticks, or giving a momentary shelter to this trembling and forlorn multitude; that circumstance, it is evident, was selected by the historian on account of its connexion with what is afterwards related of the viper that fixed itself on the hand of *Paul*, ver. 3, 4.

And indeed we cannot, without impiety, suppose, that the sacred author would have thus displayed the great kindness of the people of *Melita*, if they had plundered the wreck, and deprived the shipwrecked men of that part of their worldly goods, which even the tempest had spared,

Having thus given you a plain view of the text, I propose to draw from it, *1<sup>st</sup>*, A use of instruction, by displaying the conduct of the people of *Melita*, as a model praise-worthy in itself, and deserving your imitation; and *2<sup>dly</sup>*, A use of correction, by comparing it with the conduct of many among us on a late awful occasion. Had you well considered the *former* in the course of your meditations, the *latter* would have been less necessary.

My brethren, If you search the scriptures without a view to your spiritual instruction, all your searches are vain, and to you the word of God remains nothing more than a dead and uninstructional letter. If you peruse the scriptures for amusement only, as a cunningly devised story, the tales of poets, the frantic visions of enthusiasts, and *old womens fables*; will be as useful to  
your

your souls as the truths which the Spirit of God has recorded for your example.

Being indeed persuaded that these things are so, you will attend to me with patience, while, from the behaviour of the people of *Melita*, I endeavour to convey instruction to your hearts.

These Pagans, on seeing the distress of the seafaring men, flew to their assistance, received them with all kindness, and relieved them to the best of their abilities. And who were the men for whose sake so much sympathy and brotherly love was displayed? They were a mixed multitude of mariners, mercenary soldiers, and prisoners; of prisoners, that is, real or supposed criminals; strangers all to the people of *Melita*, and many of them of a character nowise amiable. But humanity, like its merciful Author, is no respecter of persons; and there is something sacred in wretchedness, to which all but sinners the most obdurate must approach with a certain silent reverence. Had the shipwrecked men been their friends and countrymen, with whom, peradventure, *they had taken sweet counsel together, and gone up to the house of their gods*, Psalm lv. 14. their compassion for them could not have been greater, nor their zeal to relieve them more fervent.

Poor blinded Pagans! they rashly believed that *Paul* was a murderer, v. 4. and they as rashly concluded him to be a divinity, v. 6. yet tho' their notions of religion were dark, and their judgment of the ways of Providence vain, they had humanity; and would to God that they may never rise up in judgment against a more enlightened generation, Luke xi. 31.

Your

Your own consciences. my brethren, already tell you, that I am approaching to that use of correction which I proposed to draw from the words of my text. Harken then, for I will deal plainly with you.

Let me revive in your remembrance the terrors of that fatal morning, when two fair vessels, fraught with precious merchandice, and conducted by your dear brethren and fellow-Christians, were broken to pieces and perished in your sight. One of these vessels was in a moment overwhelmed, and all on board, *in whose nostrils was the breath of life, died*, Gen. vii. 22. *one only is escaped alone to tell it*, Job i. 19. As to the other, like the vessel to which my text relates, *the fore-part stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder-part was broken with the violence of the waves*, Acts xxvii. 41. Recall to your thoughts the state of the mariners and passengers in that hour of desolation; how they clung to the shrouds, dismayed and helpless, *crying every man unto his God*, Jonah i. 9. Think how you saw so many souls hanging on the brink of eternity, and think, with gratitude to God, the alone deliverer, that most of them, (Oh! that I could say all!) when the waters retreated, came safe to land: they were delivered from destruction, and they were glad, for the Lord *brought them out of their distress*, Psal. cvii. 28.

It is true, that their own substance, the all of many of them, and the goods of various proprietors, committed to the charge of the master, still floated to and fro on the deep; but there were hopes, and those not unreasonable, that the sea would render them up.

Well



Well might they flatter themselves that the bitterness of their lot was past, and that they were now rescued, as well from the dread of poverty as from the terrors of death. If the barbarous inhabitants of *Melita* shewed no little kindness to strangers, what mercy might have been looked for from *Britons* and Christians, to their fellow-*Britons* and fellow-Christians ?

But oh the dreadful night which followed ! Well may the sharers of the guilt of that night cry out with *Job*, *As for that night, let darkness seize upon it ; let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months*, *Job* iii. 6. Then it was that oppression and unrestrained licence were seen on our coasts ; that robbery, aggravated robbery in the sight of God and man, walked abroad, and was not ashamed. What was done on that night without controul, and in the ensuing days with more caution and more refinement in wickedness, the consciences of the guilty best know ; and they may assure themselves, that it shall one day be revealed, with every circumstance of unfeeling and obstinate iniquity, in the presence of the great God and his holy angels.

To dwell on particulars would be endless ; let me only say, We all know who it was that intoxicated himself with stolen liquors, till he became as brutal in his outward appearance as in his hard heart, and, after a stupefaction of two days, awaked, by the mercy of God, in this world, not, as by his justice he might have done, in the place of torment.

“ How do these Christians love one another ! ” was the exclamation of a Heathen when he beheld the mutual affection of the disciples of *Jesus* exerting itself in all the offices

sices of charity : had that Heathen lived in our days, and beheld the crouds of active persons assembled about the wreck on our coasts, he would have made the same exclamation, " How do these " Christians love one another ! " Say, could you have born witness to the testimony of this Heathen ? Alas ! there were many, very many there, who came not from love, but from base avarice ; who were active, not in preserving, but in plundering ; the followers of that accursed spirit, who goeth about seeking whom he may devour, not the disciples of the merciful *Jesus*.

It is said, that many in the country do not look upon the plundering of a wreck as sinful.

Let such wretches, if such there be, learn that they do not understand the nature of sin. They do not consider *that* to be sin which is prohibited by God, and is offensive to his holy and pure nature, nor that which injures our fellow creatures, nor that which the inward much despised monitor every moment tells them to be sin. No ; they have more compendious doctrines concerning sin : they imagine, though they dare not tell their conscience so, *that* to be sin, and *that* only, which earthly magistrates can easily discover, and human laws easily punish. Thus it will be sin with them to rob upon the sea, or upon the highways, because they may meet with resistance, be apprehended, and brought to punishment. It is sinful, in their opinion, to steal a flock of sheep, not because of the eight or of the tenth commandment, but because every shepherd knoweth his own, and a discovery may bring them to *shame* ; so they term it, as if the shame consisted not in the guilt, but in the corporal punishment.

But

But they who thus dread shame stand in little awe of damnation ; and therefore they will steal their neighbours' grass or corn, on which they bestow the gentle name of *picking*. To the ignorant, they will sell by false weights ; with the simple, they will use short measure ; in the quality of the goods they sell, in accompting with their masters, in paying every public tax, they will deceive : and this is not stealing with them, nor deceit ; but only an *advantage* which a poor man may take, whenever discovery becomes difficult. The same men, when they see a ship broken up by the violence of the waves, will crowd to share in the spoil, and will divide it among them, as if they had gained it in lawful war from the enemies of their country. Though they know that the goods belong to their fellow subjects, they will be ignorant of it ; though they see them standing alive before their eyes, they will suppose that they are all overwhelmed in the deep ; though they observe marks on the bales of most value, they never once imagine that such marks are there to indicate the owners ; if any of those who assist in recovering the goods from the sea intrust them to their care, they wish to persuade themselves that it is a gift : and, at last, adding the most shocking impiety to the vilest barbarity, they return rejoicing to their own homes, and call their rapine a *God-send*.

And, dost thou then presume to make the just God the associate of thy villanies, thou daring blasphemous sinner ? and dost thou think that *he is altogether such a one as thyself* ? Psal. l. 21. No ; you cannot be so abandoned : but, by changing the name of your actions, you fondly hope



hope to change their nature ; and whenever confusion and darkness hide you from the eyes of men, or whenever the number of your associates assist, as it were, in keeping you in countenance, you then deceive, steal, rob and plunder, and you say, I have not sinned.

Let me not argue with such men from the holy scriptures, that would be *to cast pearls before swine* ; but I will appeal to that *one* authority which they will not controvert, and that is *self*. If any one of those hell-taught casuists, returning home intoxicated from a market, should chance to drop his upper-garment, and one of his fellows should pick it up, lay hold of the advantage, and keep it as a *God-send*, say, would he be a thief ? Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee !

If a domestic fowl should wander from the door of one whose notions of wrong are so very circumscribed, and his neighbour should *just take it up and carry it home*, (I use your own justifying phrases) would not such a one be a heinous thief ? would not redress be demanded in the most clamorous manner, and the offender obliged to pay to the utmost farthing ?

An upper garment, then, or a chicken taken from any of yourselves, is sinful theft ; but to waste and plunder the substance of hundreds, to a greater value than what you would sell for, (were there creatures like yourselves found to buy you) is no transgression, no offence against the laws of your Maker, and of him who seeks to redeem you.

But though, my brethren, such of you as may have offended in this sort will not bid defiance to the laws of God, and to the testimony

of your own conscience, by asserting your own integrity ; yet you may be apt to excuse yourselves by the last sad pretence of a self-condemning criminal : and you will say, That your sin *is a little one*; you put forth your hand and took somewhat of small value, which the owner might well spare, and which has not enriched you.

My brethren, in confessing guilt, though with deceitful and vain alleviations, you show that you are not yet hardened in iniquity. Oh ! let me endeavour to cherish this first appearance of life in you ; let me awake your souls to contrition.

What each of you may have carried away of goods, which were and still are your neighbours, your consciences, and he who is greater than your consciences, only know. But let me assure you, that by the means of you, and of such as you, many industrious families have been reduced to indigence, and many more have suffered very sensible detriment. When the number of thieves is great, what each in particular steals will be less than if there were fewer hands at this most unrighteous and accursed harvest. But what, alas ! is it to the unhappy sufferer, whether you have divided his spoils among you, or whether one more successful robber has possessed himself of it alone.

But permit me to descend into particulars, for I would not leave any of you unconvinced ; because, unless convinced, your spiritual state is beyond all power of expression dreadful !

One woman, I am assured, oh that she were here, to listen to this accusation against her ! carried off a number of pieces of coin : from the superscription and from the colour she believed

lieved them to be gold; but they were brass, worthless brass. She, you will acknowledge, contracted the guilt of stealing gold because her heart led her to that, and she thought that she had done it. Here you see one who has departed from the living God, and yet her covetousness hath profited her nothing. Now, my brethren, are not you also under the like condemnation? was it tenderness for the wants of your countrymen, and shall I call them *your* fellow-christians, that made you steal by weight and by measure, with a sparing hand and with moderation in guilt? or was it because you could get no more, that you took no more? was it your own mercy or the rapacity of the partakers of your wickedness, which made your share of the spoil so very small?

Alas! my poor deluded brethren, your share of the guilt is great, whatever may have been your share of the spoil. Know that it was covetousness which made you forget your duty to God and man, which stifled the voice of humanity in your bosoms, which made you *transgress the covenant of the Lord, and work folly in Israel*, Joshua vii. 15. Was it the extent of *Achan's* theft, think ye, which incensed the Lord against his chosen people, and made them to turn their backs in the day of battle? Did God consider the worth of the goodly *Babylonish* garment, or the value of the wedge of gold, or of the shekels of silver? No; *Achan* sinned by disobeying the command of God, in appropriating to his own use the spoils of the enemy, concerning which the Lord had said, they shall be utterly destroyed. You also have sinned in like sort, and with this aggravation, that *Achan* took what would otherwise have perished, you, what might have



been restored to its righteous owner ; he, from the enemies of his people, you, from your own countrymen ; he transgressed a *positive* precept, you, precepts both *positive* and *moral*. Many among you, I know, hate the very sound of *moral* and *morality* ; and no wonder : but I must cry aloud in your ears, that you have sinned against the dictates of humanity, against the known laws of your country, which you are bound to reverence and obey ; against conscience, that law in your hearts ; against the repeated commands of God, pronounced as well in *Jerusalem* as from mount *Sinai*, as well in the covenant of grace as in the ordinances of *Moses* ; and, if ought else can be added to this charge, against that law of love taught and perfected by the merciful *Jesus*.

You know what the Lord spake concerning the offence of *Achan* : *Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I have commanded them, for they have taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even amongst their own stuff.* Joshua vii. 11.

*They have stolen, dissembled, and have put it even amongst their own stuff !* Hear the dreadful punishment of this offence recorded in the 24th and 25th verses of the same chapter. *And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan, the son of Zerah, and the silver and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had : and they brought them into the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us ? the Lord shall trouble thee this day ; and all Israel stoned him with stones,*  
and

and burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.

You will, perhaps, murmur in your own hearts and say, that the punishment was severe, and that we live under a more merciful dispensation. Yes, my unhappy brethren, the punishment was indeed severe; but it was such as the justice of God and the bold disobedience of the *Israelites* required. We *do* live under a more merciful dispensation, for now every man shall suffer for his own transgression, and every man shall die by his own sins: but surely, if the soul be of more value than the body; if it be worse to be blotted out of the book of God, than to have no house in Israel; if a momentary punishment is exceeded by ages of torment; then as surely the vengeance denounced in the gospel exceeds that denounced by the law.

Were I to leave you here, my brethren, after having thus displayed in your presence the good deeds of the people of *Melita*, and the folly, the evil, and the misery of an opposite conduct, especially in our days, and in our merciful circumstances; you might, perhaps, reap no benefit from all that I have delivered. As you chance to be differently affected, you might, during the evening, either praise or blame the preacher; yet by the returning light, you might probably forget both him and his instructions, and your only remaining care might be to discover who it was that intoxicated himself with stolen drink, or who it was that received, as the wages of iniquity, brass instead of gold. But I have something more to say unto you: hearken then, O, hearken unto the voice of my exhortation.

*First*, Then, ye my dearly beloved and Christian brethren,

brethren, whose eye pitied, and whose hand helped, ye who shewed no little kindness to your fellow-creatures, countrymen and christians ; in the name of our glorious Master I call you blessed : he has said, *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*, Matth. v. 7.

Hear the precious promises declared by the same messenger of good tidings, Matth. x. 42. *Whosoever*, says our Lord, *shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in nowise lose his reward.* You see here a promise, that the meanest and the cheapest offices of humanity will be remembred by God ; and he is faithful who hath thus promised. But what is said with respect to the proceedings at the great day of judgment is still more explicite. You who have been so lately employed in the works of mercy, and who have relieved your poor brethren for Christ's sake, know the passage well ; but I will repeat it in your hearing, that they who have no interest in such promises may learn how far your hopes exceed theirs : *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations ; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats : and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in : naked, and ye clothed me :*



*me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me, Matth. xxv. 31,—40.* Thus will all acts of charity and beneficence be remembred and rewarded by God in that day when he shall come to judge the quick and the dead; and of this reward, I hope, ye, my brethren, will be partakers.

Suffer me, however, to lay before you some short observations, which may be particularly applicable to your case.

And, 1<sup>st</sup>, Let me recal to your memory that pleasure which you felt when you were employed in aiding and relieving the afflicted. Herein you may be said to have been partakers of the blessed temper of him *who went about doing good, Acts x. 38. and whose meat it was to do the will of him that sent him, John xiv. 34.* The pleasure that you then felt will often present itself to your minds, and still with a new relish; it will accompany you through the dark valley of death, and it will, I trust, be compleated in your souls in the eternal state of love and felicity. Great indeed must the joys of true religion be, when the momentary exercise of it in one single particular is attended with so much heart-felt satisfaction, and when the remembrance of it is so sweet!

2<sup>dly</sup>, Though great rewards are promised to us through *Christ* when we perform particular duties

duties with a willing heart and with unfeigned charity, yet we must beware of mistaking *part* of our duty for the *whole*: we ought rather to reflect with awe and self abasement, that as much is promised to us, much will be required of us; and that God, who in his mercy remembers all our deeds of beneficence, will also execute justice on evil-doers.

3dly, Be humble; a short but comprehensive lesson. You see how the blessed are represented as speaking at the great day of retribution; *Lord, when did we, &c.* as if they were scarcely conscious of the nature of their acts of beneficence. If you have true humility, you will also have love, or *Christian charity*; you will not take up *a reproach against your neighbour*, Psal. xv. 3. you will view their conduct in the most favourable light; and when you cannot justify them, as must be your case with relation to the late inhuman plunderers, you will endeavour to instruct and to convert them, and, if you have no opportunity of doing this, you will still pray for their instruction and conversion.

Finally, Let me adjure you by the tender mercies of God in Christ *Jesus*, if ever the like calamity of shipwreck should happen on your coast, that you be careful to repeat those offices of kindness and brotherly love, for which you are now extolled in the churches. Some of you, I know, have rashly declared, that as you have been numbered with evil-doers by the hard judgment of the public, you are resolved, upon any future occasion of the same kind, to keep at a distance from the sufferers, and thereby avoid censure. My dear brethren, in this thing you *have spoken unadvisedly with your lips*. Grievous indeed it

is for flesh and blood to bear unmerited reproach; but remember that your Christian course is thro' *evil report* as well as *good*, 2 Cor. vi. 8. they who censure you cannot deprive you of the testimony of a good conscience; and God, who seeth all things, will pronounce righteous judgment. Let me further admonish you, that if you *be weary in well-doing*, you shall not reap in due season, Gal. vi. 9. and that if you deny your assistance to the wretched, from the dread of human censure, you will incur a censure infinitely more severe. But of this no more: for I mean to comfort you under unjust reproach, not to afflict your spirits.

Next, I turn my discourse to you—to you *who have stolen and dissembled, and put it even amongst your own stuff*. Shall I read *your* sentence also out of the word of God? Read it, all of you, in your own consciences, deeply engraven there, as with a pen of iron: *Give glory then to the God of Israel, and make confession unto him*, and say with the wretched criminal Achan, *Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel*, Joshua. vii. 20. You have indeed grievously sinned; Repent, or ye *must* perish.

You may perhaps, in the anguish of your soul, cry out, Lord, I repent me of mine iniquity, Oh, Lord, do thou pardon: you may promise amendment, and implore the divine grace to aid your feeble endeavours.

But this will avail you nothing as long as your conversion is confined to the words, *I repent, I repent*: this is a mocking of God, and it is a deluding of your own souls. Without **RESTITUTION** of what you have plundered from your helpless brethren, all your pretences of amendment are



vain : if you do not restore, you are not indeed sensible of your sin; and if you are not sensible of your sin, you will again offend in the same sort, if ever, which God avert, the same opportunity should present itself.

I fear that this doctrine of restitution will be thought a hard saying by many among you. In some cases, indeed, it is impossible to make restitution. The murderer, for example, cannot by all his repentance, and by all his tears, recall to life his brother whom he has slain. But if it was in the murderer's power to restore his brother to life, think ye, that without so doing his repentance would be accepted of God ?

You purpose, no doubt, by your vows of repentance, to lead a life of purity and justice in time to come. Alas, poor deluded creatures ! you have stolen goods in your custody ; they are not yours, and yet you use them as your own : every moment that you retain the smallest part of them in your possession, you repeat that crime, the commission of which our coasts so lately witnessed, that very crime which you would now deplore in tears of contrition.

Are you then to be gainers by your iniquity ? are you to enjoy a greater share of worldly goods after your repentance than you would have enjoyed, if you had not sinned in that sort at all ?

If one of your neighbours should come unto you, and say, " My brother, I have offended against thee, for I have stolen from thee so and so, and lo, I have it hid in my house, I pray thee now forgive me ;" I hope you would answer, " I forgive thee, the Lord forgive : " sure I am, you would say, " Restore unto me that which thou hast stolen." If your neighbour should

Should refuse to restore it, would you not term him a hardened reprobate, an insolent offender? You yourselves are what you detest in him; but with this difference, that as his conduct was to you, so is yours to the Great God of heaven.

Is this the repentance to which Christ came to call sinners! If such be your opinion of repentance, you will, perhaps, on the first Christian Sabbath, array yourselves in your best attire, you will come up to the house of the Lord, and worship before the God of your fathers: But in what attire, ye hypocrites? Arrayed in the spoils of your countrymen!

If you will yet retain your ungodly plunder, hear what will befall you: It will imbitter every innocent enjoyment; it will be a canker to devour the former fruits of your honest industry; when the moth shall eat it, or the rust consume it, or some thief, like yourselves, break through and steal it, the remembrance of your transgression shall wax more grievous, as the means of doing justice to those whom you spoiled becomes more difficult: at length you shall die, your evil works shall follow you into an eternal state, and there you shall have your portion with the unjust.

Thus, with all plainness, have I spoken unto you. If you indeed mean to pacify your offended God, or to work out your own salvation through him who is *able* to save *repenting* sinners, then let restitution be made by all of you, strict, conscientious, unlimited and immediate restitution.

But you may say, for covetousness is ever ingenious in pretences, To whom should we make restitution? they whom we have wronged are unknown to us, and must we come before the magistrates of the land and accuse ourselves?

You see here, my brethren, into what straits your sins have insensibly led you. However, without entering into any questions of casuistry, the best advice I can give you is, that you make restitution in the hands of your pastor, or of the gravest and most prudent of your elders. But oh ! beware of partial imperfect restitution ; search your hearts, and see that no piece of leaven remain there ; let restitution be made of the whole goods, or of their full value, as in the presence of God the searcher of all hearts.

Need I inform you, that you must not settle accompts as it were with those whom you have injured, nor detain even the smallest portion under shew of your having been at expence or trouble in preserving that which you stole. Were not the heart of man *deceitful above all things*, Jer. xvii. 9. I should have spared this admonition.

Let me conclude with cautioning you to avoid that snare into which many thieves, robbers, plunderers and oppressors have fallen : convinced of the evil of their ways, they have resolved to make reparation, not by restoring their ungodly purchase, but by bestowing some part of it on the poor ; a tenth, for instance, of the fruits of their oppression, yearly paid, they have considered as an ample atonement. Fools ! as if they were *just* in paying tithes of other mens substance, or *secure* in laying a plan for a repentance not to be perfected in less than ten long years, they *whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth*, Job iv. 19.

Some of you here present may perhaps have listened with much attention to what I have been delivering, not because it has touched their own  
state,



state, but because it has, as they think, no relation to it. They who have not put forth their hand, nor stole, may, like the proud self-satisfied self-deceiving Pharisee in scripture, *pray thus within themselves, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust,* Luke xviii. 11. But do you know who it is that thus speaks, and of whom these words are spoken? *When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him,* Psal. l. 18. it is God who thus speaks to the wicked.

You who were witnesses to the late inhuman depredations, who can point out those wicked persons, and yet connive at their sin, who, by your silence, suffer them to enjoy the fruits of it with all worldly security; you are now sharers in their guilt, and will one day partake of their condemnation.

But you will say, "Must we then become *informers*?" My brethren, you deceive yourselves by the mis-use of words: he whose lot it is to be a spectator at the commission of such grievous offences as those of which I speak, is not dishonoured in revealing them; but, in keeping silence, he becomes a *consenter with thieves*. The guilty may term you *informers*, but know, that in this *you glorify God*.

"We shall get *ill-will* from our neighbours," you will say: and do you then dread the reproaches of men, as bad or worse than yourselves, more than the vengeance of God, denounced in the fiftieth psalm.

But "We may be brought into *trouble*, as you call it, by attending courts of justice, and giving our evidence:" Do you then think it so great a trouble to bear witness to the truth?

All

All these are vain excuses by which you endeavour to deceive yourselves. Believe me, or, if you will not believe *me*, believe your *own* conscience, and they will tell you, that it is because you are not sensible of the enormity of a sin which does not personally affect yourselves, that you thus keep silence, and permit the spoiler to triumph in his spoil.

Had you seen yourselves plundered and ruined by that lawless multitude, you would not then have scrupled to become *informers*; you would not have dreaded the *ill-will* of your neighbours, nor would you have spared *trouble* for their detection and punishment. It seems then, that notwithstanding the repeated commands of your Lord and Saviour, you do not *love your neighbour as yourselves*.

There is a *third* sort of offenders whom I must not leave unrebuked; they are the men who, though they neither plundered the wreck, nor consented with thieves, yet are not innocent.

For them also who assisted the unhappy sufferers, but at an exorbitant hire, and who took a most unchristian advantage of the necessities of their brethren, there is a condemnation written; they are *extortioners*, and as such secluded from the fellowship of the faithful, 1 *Cor.* v. 11. I speak this to awaken them to the thoughts of their spiritual danger: to restitution I need not call them; for their offence is so easily discovered, and lies so open to the cognizance of human laws, that they have not so much as the poor hope of profiting in this vain transitory life by their ungodly gain.

Thus, my brethren, having adapted my discourse to your various conditions, I leave you to  
your

your own meditations and to the grace of God :  
*To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not  
 your hearts, as in the provocation, and as in the  
 day of temptation, Psal. xcv. 7, 8. Depart  
 from evil, and, which is the true scripture-proof  
 of the sincerity of your repentance, Do that  
 which is right.*

Now, to him who remembereth our frame, who  
 knoweth that we are but dust, who hath com-  
 passion upon us, who offereth forgiveness unto us  
 all, for we all have sinned ; to God, Creator  
 Redeemer and Sanctifier, by us, his weak, sin-  
 ful, humbled creatures, be ascribed all praise.  
*Amen.*



